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THE FIRST MESSAGE OF JACOB HAUSSLING MAYOR

Presented to the Common Council of the City of Newark, New Jersey, January 3rd, 1907

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THE FIRST MESSAGE OF JACOB HAUSSLING

MAYOR

PRESENTED TO THE COMMON COUNCIL
OF THE CITY OF NEWARK,
NEW JERSEY. Mayor

January Third, Nineteen Hundred and Seven

NEWARK, N. J.
H. MURPHY, PRINTER, 317 MARKET STREET

1907

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MAYOR JACOB HAUSSLING

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MAYOR'S MESSAGE.

NEWARK, N. J., January 3, 1907.

To the Honorable
The Common Council
Newark, N. J.

GENTLEMEN:

Notwithstanding a constant increase in disbursements for ordinary municipal administration and considerable recent additions to the bonded indebtedness, the credit of Newark remains unimpaired and the city's securities command the highest prices in the financial markets of the country. This, while it is a cause for congratulation, may also be said to convey its warning, for on no account should the city be allowed to lose its high financial rank among American municipalities.

The gross indebtedness of the city is about $24,000,000, and the net city debt $17,000,000. This includes the debt incurred in the acquirement of the water plant, whose earnings are sufficient to pay the interest and sinking fund charges upon the bonds issued on this account. Deducting the self-paying water bonds the city's indebtedness which is chargeable upon the whole body of property owners is in round numbers $8,000,000.

Though this sum is well within the limit of safety, it is incumbent upon every official of the city government to do his utmost, that the bonded indebtedness may not be increased without absolute necessity. The times are prosperous, business is flourishing and the burdens, which can be endured now, may become unendurable if a period of depression should come. There have not been wanting

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lately evidence of a disposition to incur large expenditures because the city is in excellent financial condition.

The increase in the tax ordinance of 1906 over that of the previous year was $500,000. A total of $5,000,000 was raised during the last year by the taxpayers for governmental purposes alone in addition to the sums received from the State, $220,000; from liquor and other licenses, $425,000; from court fees, permits, special licenses, market rents, etc., $500,000; from the water department, $1,000,000; a total of perhaps $7,225,000, of which probably something like $6,000,000 was devoted to city uses.

This is a great sum to be asked in one year from the people of our city, and we may well ponder before adopting measures that will increase it in succeeding years. I would not be understood as opposing any truly necessary undertaking, and I would advise that economy be a watchword as well as progress. Let us save the resources of the city for the day of emergencies and not fritter them away in useless channels.

TAXATION.

The taxpayers of Newark have been compelled this last year to shoulder burdens for which no warrant could be found in any peculiar emergency or exigency, and which would have been largely unnecessary with a wise and economical administration of municipal affairs. Upon the pretense of ascertaining true valuations, the assessments upon real property all over the city have been enormously increased, advances of sixty to ninety per cent. being common, and many instances of raises of from 100 to 150 per cent. being recorded. If all realty shared in proportion, there would be less excuse for the clamor that has arisen in all quarters, but it can be demonstrated as a fact, I believe, that by far the greater part of the burden falls to the small property owner.

Part of the condition is doubtless chargeable to statutes

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which, boastfully put forth as vehicles for equal taxation, lamentably fail of accomplishing that result. But the situation can be ascribed chiefly to official extravagance which has been manifest in many departments of the city. Unwarranted expenditures for supplies, frequent increases of the salaries of already highly paid officials and heavy bond issues must sooner or later prove expensive luxuries for the individual taxpayer.

It will be my endeavor, in so far as possible, to put a check to wasteful and unwise expenditures wherever they may be attempted, and to secure equitable assessments upon property.

While real property from its nature can always be found and assessed for purposes of taxation, there is little question that much of the personal property held by residents of the city is sequestered in such a manner as to escape the payment of its full share to the public treasury. The problem of ascertaining and taxing personalty is as old as government, and it is probable that no scheme will ever be devised whereby all of this class of property shall be listed in the tax duplicate. At the same time, it has been found in many municipalities that the publication of the personal tax assessments, as soon as fixed by the proper authorities, has had the salutary effect of largely increasing the ratables.

Experience has shown that many persons who, if the assessments are to be kept inaccessible to the public, will attempt to escape the payment of their just dues, will, on the contrary, if the lists are to be published for the scrutiny of friends, neighbors, creditors and business associates, make full or fuller returns of personalty. I therefore recommend that this matter be not left to private enterprise, but that the personalty tax lists be published at the proper season in the form of official city advertisements.

CONGESTION OF TRAFFIC.

The congestion of vehicular traffic at the intersection

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of the two chief arteries of travel—Broad and Market streets—is daily becoming a more serious problem. Not alone does the situation involve costly inconvenience and delay to the business interests of the city, but the lives and limbs of citizens are constantly imperiled. Various remedies are proposed, such as the diversion of certain kinds of vehicles, the abolition of certain switches or curved rails, and the changing of street railway lines, for each of which something can be said.

But all of these might truthfully be termed mere expedients of half measures, which if adopted would afford merely temporary relief. The time has come in my opinion for Newark, through its public bodies, to give careful consideration to the subject of a subway for the trolley cars which add so greatly to the congestion at the point indicated. In no other way, I believe, can permanent relief be secured.

The conditions in this city in this respect resemble in many ways those prevailing in the city of Boston. There as here a vast number of trolley car lines, draining an extensive and densely populated territory, converge at one point in the centre of the city. Until the Boston subway was completed the congestion was even more serious than in Newark. The removal of the trolley car lines from the surface of the street has wrought such a wonderful change as almost to seem miraculous.

I earnestly recommend that the Common Council and the Board of Street and Water Commissioners enter upon a careful study of this suggestion, both from the financial and the engineering points of view. It may not be amiss to remark that such property as may be required by the city in the progress of such an undertaking can never again be acquired as cheaply as at the present time. Without having been able to examine sufficiently into the subject to be certain on this point, I believe that a subway could be built by the city and leased on such terms as would pay all interest

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and sinking fund charges, thus leaving no expense of the work to be borne by the taxpayers.

While not acquainted with the views of the officials charged with the management of the trolley lines, I apprehend that a subway would present so many advantageous aspects to them that they would be willing to pay liberally for its lease.

An undertaking of such magnitude involving and expenditure of great sums of money, as it would, must necessarily be approached with caution and decided upon only after a most thorough investigation and consideration of its manifold features, and a thoroughly and definitely expressed understanding between the parties in interest. But if it should be deemed feasible and desirable, no time should be wasted in taking the preliminary steps.

TRACTION COMPANIES.

One of the most potent factors in the development of Newark has been the trolley system, and I have no sympathy with unreasonable attempts to place obstacles in the way of improvements of the service which would accrue to the benefit of the city. But it should be borne in mind that whatever the traction companies have done for the city, the city has made full return in franchises the value of which increases every day.

I am strongly of the opinion, therefore, that the companies should pay for whatever favors they may receive from the city, and that no more consents for substantial privileges should be granted without compensation.

In the matter of service, Newark is entitled to the very best the companies can give, and I purpose to hold those corporations to a full and strict compliance with their contractural obligations to the municipality.

EXCISE.

Newark has a decidedly cosmopolitan population. It is not going too far to say that a great part of the old native

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stock has freely adopted some of the ideas and customs of those of the population who are of foreign birth or parentage. The latter element is indeed in a considerable majority in the community. Laws affecting the social life of the community that were well adapted to the people of Newark half a century ago are unsuitable now and do not fit the population of to-day. That fact was well shown in the results of the recent elections in the populous cities and counties of North Jersey.

Ideas in regard to social observance have also materially changed. The Blue Laws yet unrepealed on the statute book have become a public jest. In many ways, such as the running of railroads and street cars on Sunday, those laws are utterly disregarded by all classes, and the first day of the week, once held sacred from recreation and pleasure, is largely devoted to those purposes and without any evidence of harm to religious interests. In fact, all experience proves that the American citizen can safely be given his full measure of personal liberty. Undue restriction upon the individual is an irritant provocative of violation of the law. It greatly enlarges the class of law breakers, and by its "forbidden fruit" aggravates the evil it seeks to remedy or suppress. New Jersey consists of municipalities that are widely diverse in their habits, tastes, ideas and environments.

I would suggest to the Common Council an appeal to the Legislature so to frame an excise law as shall permit Newark to adopt an excise system suitable to its wants and to the wishes of the great majority of Newark's population. That can be done without infringing on the rights of any other municipality and without just complaint by the minority of Newark's population.

MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP.

The public ownership of public utilities is a question of public policy that has been widely discussed and to some extent experimented with in this country, with varying re-

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sults. I confess to a strong prejudice, on general grounds, in favor of the municipalization of some of the services now supplied to the public by private corporations. But there are certain difficulties in the way of all such enterprises, and each community finds it necessary to consider the strictly local conditions before embarking upon the experiment.

The chief obstacle encountered is how to remove a department of this character entirely from political control, not for a year or two, but for all time, and make it impossible to convert it into a dispensary of partizan favors. America's municipalities have been subjected to excessive over-charges, contract violations and inadequate service by public utility corporations to an extent to exasperate the public mind and prepare it to accept almost any kind of an experiment, however doubtful, as a means of relief. Our own city has had these experiences, and many of Newark's citizens are inclined to a policy not too expensive, that promises a permanent remedy.

It is, however, wise business policy for a city to proceed cautiously with changes which must necessarily result in the expenditure of great sums of money and, to a certain extent, disturbance of existing conditions. A civic commission composed of eminent men representing both sides of the question has made careful investigation in Europe and, it is understood, has been unfavorably impressed with the operation of municipal ownership there, and hence is disposed to report against its adoption in this country. A number of American cities have introduced, or are introducing, municipal ownership on a scale large enough to afford conclusive demonstrations of the success or failure of the theory. Before Newark should be committed finally in either way, I believe it would be well to await the result of the experiments of these other municipalities.

POLICE DEPARTMENT.

Allegations of a shocking character effecting certain

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members of the police department, were, after the Board of Commissioners had conducted an investigation, apparently merely to lull public suspicion, taken up by the late grand jury with the result that indictments were returned against three of the commissioners and a number of the superior officers. It would be improper while the officials are awaiting trial to discuss the revelations and charges that aroused the indignation of the city, but it is fitting to call attention to the fact that keen as was the public feeling of humiliation and anger at such a situation in this important department, the rank and file of the police force not only escaped censure, but received a striking tribute of the community's confidence and esteem in the form of an overwhelming vote for an increase in their salaries. The faithfulness and efficiency of the subordinate officers of the department, could not, indeed, be questioned.

While the management of the police department continues to be vested in a board of four commissioners it must be expected that dissensions and deals with attempts at shifting of responsibility will occur frequently, even if grave scandals do not result. I am strongly impressed that a single commissioner who should devote his entire time to the duties of his office, and who should be held responsible therefor, should be the head of the police department. He might have the assistance of deputies, if necessary, but he should be supreme, under the appointive power, in the management ot the force. I earnestly commend a consideration of this subject, to the end that the requisite legislation may be asked of the Legislature.

BUILDING DEPARTMENT.

Through a series of accidents to structures under its supervision with fatal consequences in some instances; through the spirit of insubordination exhibited by members of its staff on many occasions, and through the evidences of incompetency and the shameful suggestions of graft made during a recent investigation, the building department of

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the City of Newark has achieved a noisome reputation. It is not enough to say that the public has no confidence in it; it is readily apparent—to such an extent has disorganization gone—that it has no confidence in itself. It stands revealed as utterly inadequate and futile, and suspicion attaches to all its administrative acts.

Without attempting to show to what extent weakness in and of personnel have contributed, it may be stated without hesitation that the condition described is but the natural result of the system upon which the building department is conducted and which has been perpetuated by the greedy lust for patronage. That the superintendent of this bureau, in whose hands may be said to lie the very lives of our citizens, should be vested with authority, whose limits are so vaguely defined as to be a matter of constant dispute; that even this shadowy power is shared and encroached upon by a constantly changing committee of Common Council; that his subordinates are responsible to him only in the measure determined by this committee, would be incredible were it not true. But it is true, and being true it is no cause for wonder that "houses of cards" are erected in all parts of Newark, to await the time when they shall crash to the earth, maiming or killing their innocent occupants.

It is clear that the demand for drastic reform should remain unanswered no longer. The building superintendent should be an official appointed by the Mayor and answerable to him, invested with full authority to conduct his department under the rules to be prescribed by Common Council and should have the nomination if not the actual appointment of his subordinates. Both he and his subordinates should be liberally compensated, but held to a strict accountability.

The building code should be revised, so as to accord with and take cognizance of modern construction methods; so as to prevent the erection of the unsightly shacks which

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now disgrace our principal thoroughfares and to make impossible the erection of any more death traps. The Common Council should not be asked to exercise any executive power over the department, but should be permitted to confine itself to its proper legislative functions of providing the necessary municipal statutes.

In this connection, however, I urge that the Common Council seek the aid of a committee or commission upon which the legal and architectural professions and the building trade have equal representation. With the assistance of eminent followers of the foregoing vocations, who would doubtless consent to serve the city without pay, the Common Council could probably soon present a satisfactory building code. It might possibly be found advantageous to make a permanent body of such a commission, so that it might be at all times ready to advise the superintendent of buildings or the legislative authorities of the city. In such an event the commission might be invested with final authority to approve or reject plans for buildings.

I do not know how far, if at all, the city can go in the way of prescribing any standards of construction except those concerning health and safety, but if it has, as well, any power to regulate the appearance of buildings, it might with propriety adopt the proper ordinances and empower the suggested commission to decide whether or not proposed structures would accord with them. Certainly if any way can be found to stop the erection of buildings which not only deface the streets, but drive away trade from the city and lower the value of surrounding property by thousands of dollars, it should be followed.

STREET CLEANING.

With many features of civic life of which she can justly be proud, Newark has little to boast of in the condition of her streets as regards cleanliness. The almost continually filthy state of many of the thoroughfares, particu-

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larly those in the less favored sections of the city, can only adequately be characterized as shameful. That dirt breeds disease has long been recognized as a truism, and that a city which fails to clean its streets except at long intervals invites epidemics, should be equally clear.

The excuse most frequently urged for this condition of affairs is that not sufficient money is appropriated. This may be true in part, and if true should be remedied with ample grants of funds. But the trouble is more deeply rooted, and will, I am confident, be found chiefly due to a continuance of a system that divides responsibility at the head and for political reasons, or otherwise engages for the arduous manual labor involved the aged and infirm. It is difficult to condemn the folly and viciousness of such a system too strongly. Through investigations by the Board of Trade and other bodies, several methods of street cleaning, with advantageous results, have been discovered in operation in other cities, but Newark clings to that which has long been scornfully repudiated by progressive municipalities.

I recommend that the Common Council and the Board of Works join in an appeal to the Legislature for a statute permitting the creation of a department of street cleaning, to be headed by a superintendent who shall be solely responsible, who shall be appointed for a term of years, and shall be removable for cause only.

STREET PAVING AND REPAIRS.

In recent years Newark has had laid, under contracts, a considerable amount of street pavement, the composition of which is patented. I will not attempt to express an opinion upon the merits or demerits of this particular kind of pavement, but I urge that the city should have all the benefits that competition brings in a matter of this kind, and therefore should refuse to specify materials or processes that can only be furnished by a monopoly.

I cordially commend the return to macadam and telford

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for the outlying residence sections where travel is light and call the attention of the Board of Street and Water Commissioners to the many streets, particularly in the factory and tenement districts, which have either never been paved or have pavements which have long since outlived their usefulness.

The nuisance caused by the continued tearing up and the tardy restoration of pavements by public utility corporations and others might be largely mitigated if proper measures were enforced. It is my purpose to stop the cutting of pavements except when clearly necessary, and to require the restoration of the street surface to its original condition as soon as possible.

PASSAIC PURIFICATION.

The purification of the Passaic River is a matter of vital concern to the people of Newark and of other municipalities bordering upon that stream. The bitter strife which prevented any effective action for many years has at length died down and there now seems to be substantial agreement upon the main points at issue. There is therefore a favorable prospect that the negotiations set on foot last year by committees composed of officials and private citizens of this city and Paterson will result in the presentation to the Legislature of a bill to permit the building of a joint trunk sewer which shall carry off the sewage and other refuse which now pollute the river. To forward this great work in every way possible is my desire and I promise every effort to that end.

DEEPER RIVER CHANNEL.

The great prosperity and growth of Newark are largely due to the navigable river upon whose banks the city is built. By reason of the low charges made for transportation of freight by water, Newark merchants and manufacturers are enabled to secure favorable rates from the

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railroad companies for the carrying of their goods. The commerce of the Passaic has grown to enormous proportions, but must soon suffer a serious check unless the river channel can be deepened so as to permit vessels of large draft to come up to the city docks. Through the enterprise of the Board of Trade the subject has been fully and graphically presented to Congress with a plea for an adequate appropriation for a work of such importance. While a matter of this kind lies without the province of the Mayor of the city, I take pleasure in expressing my willingness to co-operate at any time and in any way with those who are seeking to bring about this necessary improvement.

SCHOOL FACILITIES.

Newark has within the past few years expended considerable sums in the effort to provide adequate public school facilities for the young of the city. But so rapid has been the growth of the municipality that the multiplication of school houses has scarcely relieved the pressure. Indeed in some sections the need of greater accommodations is more acute than ever before. It seems to me that this is the problem of prime importance for Newark to solve. It must be clear that not only is it the duty of the city, from a highly moral standpoint, to provide for the education of its children, but that, considered in a more selfish light, its most profitable field of investment will be found here.

I am, therefore, in favor of liberal appropriations to this account. But while recognizing the value of technical and commercial courses, and the desirability of the extension of the facilities for students in the higher branches, I submit that our first duty is to the little boys and girls who are now crowded into inadequate buildings and compelled to attend half-day classes. Until the city can provide satisfactory accommodations for every child of the primary and

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grammar grades, the costly commercial and technical high school building should be deferred.

SECRET SESSIONS.

I am utterly opposed to the transaction of public business in private, and I shall do my best to bring about the abolition of secret sessions of the several boards of the city and their committees. Newark has had recently too severe and costly lessons to tolerate such practises any longer. The arguments in favor of secret sessions are specious and are readily contradicted by the results. It may be presumed that the city has nothing to conceal in its negotiations, and it should decline to do business with individuals or concerns who object to having their propositions examined in the light of day.

EMPLOYMENT AGENCIES.

I am credibly informed that a number of concerns operating under the guise of employment agencies for domestic servants are in reality engaged in a system of swindling which finds its victims both in prospective employers and those who seek employment. The fraud, however, is accomplished in such a way as to be difficult of proof under the criminal law, and I therefore advise a revision of the ordinance upon this subject with a view to checking the practise.

CIVIL SERVICE.

I favor the gradual extension of the civil service principle to all the departments of the city government, and the adoption of the merit system of promotions.

CHARTER REVISION.

In other sections of this message I have made recommendations regarding several of the departments, which would involve, if followed, amendments to the charter of

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the city. A general revision of the charter has been urged from time to time by persons conversant with the needs of the municipality, and it would seem to be an appropriate time for consideration of this subject. I would suggest, therefore, that the Common Council give thought to the matter, and if it be deemed expedient, to seek the concurrence and co-operation of Jersey City, which as the other first-class municipality of the State must necessarily be affected by changes in the charter of Newark.

Respectfully submitted,

JACOB HAUSSLING,

Mayor.

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